

# Church Leadership on the Unaccompanied Migrant Children Crisis

July, 2014

## [Pope Francis](#)

“I would also like to draw attention to the tens of thousands of children who migrate alone, unaccompanied, to escape poverty and violence: This is a category of migrants from Central America and Mexico itself who cross the border with the United States under extreme conditions and in pursuit of a hope that in most cases turns out to be vain. They are increasing day by day. This humanitarian emergency requires, as a first urgent measure, these children be welcomed and protected. These measures, however, will not be sufficient, unless they are accompanied by policies that inform people about the dangers of such a journey and, above all, that promote development in their countries of origin. Finally, this challenge demands the attention of the entire international community so that new forms of legal and secure migration may be adopted.”

## [Cardinal Sean O’Malley](#)

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Bishop Eusebio Elizondo

[1.](#) "This vulnerable group is fleeing violence from organized criminal networks. Many are likely to be eligible for a variety of forms of immigration relief, including asylum and various visas. Sending these vulnerable children back to their persecutors without a meaningful immigration hearing would severely decrease their opportunity for legal protection and possibly lead to their bodily harm or even death. We would oppose the repeal of key provisions of these laws in the supplemental appropriations bill or any other legislative vehicle."

[2.](#) “This is a very complicated problem, but its roots must be addressed, both by our government and governments in the region. These children are extremely vulnerable to human traffickers and unscrupulous smugglers and must be



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protected. Over the long term, the increasing violence from gangs and organized crime in their home countries must be addressed and controlled so they can be secure in their homes.”

#### [Bishop Kevin Farrell of Dallas](#)

“The cause of this flood of refugee children — the unstable and unsafe conditions of some Central American countries — must be addressed, but the immediate problem is the children who are being warehoused in overcrowded and unsafe temporary facilities by the government.”

#### [Bishop Daniel Flores of Brownsville](#)

“I think it's impossible for most people in the United States to imagine both the conditions that they're coming from in their country in terms of just the fear of a violent death, or the conditions that they experienced as they passed through the interior of Mexico, where there's a great deal of preying upon these youth. There are policy issues that have to be addressed, but the immediate need is to address what the children need and how to help them, because the church's first response has to be to the human person. We offer them a change of clothing, a shower, some baby clothes if that's needed ... a first pair of shoes that they've seen in a long time.”

#### [Bishop Michael Olson of Fort Worth](#)

“The urgency of the situation requires that we not only respond promptly but prudently---that is, in a measured, stable, collaborative and ordered manner that does not unintentionally or inadvertently do more harm to these already vulnerable minors. As Pope Francis recently stated, ‘Let us be close to refugees, sharing their fears and their uncertainty about the future and concretely alleviating their suffering.’ I encourage each of us to reach out to our elected officials to remind them that this crisis is of a humanitarian character. Please ask them to direct our nation to work with the leaders of other nations to promote sound and just policies that respond to the violence and injustice that is at the root of this crisis.”

#### [Bishop Mark Seitz of El Paso](#)

1. “I note that the protection of migrant children is an especially important issue for the Catholic Church, as one of Jesus’ first experiences as an infant was to flee for his life from King Herod with his family to Egypt. Indeed, Jesus Himself was a child migrant fleeing violence. Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were asylum-seekers and faced the same choice as the one facing thousands of children fleeing to the United States each year.”

2. “Too often, and especially recently in the media, these children are being looked at with distrust and as capable adult actors, instead of as vulnerable and frightened children who have been introduced to the injustice and horror of the world at an early age. Anyone who hears the stories of these children would be moved, as they are victims fleeing violence and terror, not perpetrators.”

#### [Bishop John Wester of Salt Lake City](#)

“These children haven’t left their homes and traveled hundreds of miles on a lark. They fled seeking hope. In their home countries they live in fear of violent gangs that operate almost with impunity. Drug trafficking and the sex trade have made kidnapping and extortion part of everyday life. Many parents feel that the best way to protect their children is to send them to the U.S. What except desperation would cause parents to send their sons and daughters away on what they know will be a perilous journey, one that costs more than a year of wages to pay for, one that puts their children at the risk of being abused, abandoned or killed?”

[Bishop David Zubik of Pittsburgh](#)

“There have been questions as to why Catholics are involved. The Catholic Church responds to humanitarian crises here at home and all across the world because we are pro-life. Being pro-life requires we protect and care for vulnerable persons from conception to natural death. It has been reported that some of these children are fleeing violence. The current law requires that they receive a hearing to determine if in fact they are refugees fleeing grave danger.